United Nations

A/53/PV.89

General Assembly

Fifty-third Session

Official Records

89th plenary meeting
Friday, 11 December 1998, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mungra (Suriname), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 46 *(continued)*

Fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

(a) Fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of the Philippines.

Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines): The Philippines is especially privileged to take part in the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As one of the original 48 countries that adopted the Universal Declaration, the Philippines reaffirms its abiding faith in that Declaration. It regards the basic human rights and fundamental freedoms contained therein as universal and inalienable. They are inherent in the individual and are indispensable to the dignity and integrity of every human being.

The delegations which are speaking today attest to the value we all attach to human rights. This reflects a shared recognition of what this historic document has done to change the lives of all mankind. It has served as a powerful tool by which Governments have been made accountable and their actions measured.

Since its adoption in 1948, the Declaration has spawned, and continues to give birth to, numerous conventions and declarations. The rights of women, children and individuals who are disadvantaged have increasingly received special focus. This is proof that the Declaration is not only a living document but is equal to the challenges of changing times and circumstances.

Nevertheless, in recent years, questions have been raised about the universality and relevance of the Declaration as new and complex human rights issue have emerged. The Philippines views this development as a healthy sign — an indication that more and more States are showing an interest in human rights and are willing to spend time on questions that will help in the elaboration and further development of the principles enshrined in the Declaration. In this regard, we commend the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the High Commissioner herself for taking an active part in the debate by providing a forum where questions can be asked and answers formulated.

As we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration, we must not only take stock of achievements in the field of human rights but also focus on the work that remains to be done. During the first 50 years of the Declaration, emphasis was placed on the promotion of political and civil rights. However, those rights largely remain on paper for the great number of people who are effectively prevented from enjoying those rights because of poverty — the homeless, the hungry, the disabled and those who have no access to the minimum basic

98-86680 (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

necessities to live decently. Particularly in countries with pervasive poverty, economic rights are as important as civil and political rights.

Therefore, we believe that the next 50 years should be dedicated to the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development in order to fulfil the promise contained in the Universal Declaration of social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. In this regard, it may be opportune to elaborate on article 28 of the Declaration to create a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration can be realized and to which everyone is entitled.

Perhaps one of the most important factors for the future of human rights is how well we and our United Nations Organization can meet the challenge of realizing the universality of human rights. Our Organization must itself be more democratic and less prone to politicizing human rights, and it must have the resources it requires to carry out its mandates, nearly all of which, if not all, directly deal with and affect human rights. As individual nations, we must work to make human rights a reality for all. But we can do much more with a United Nations that itself functions with full respect for the basic principles of human rights and which has the resources it needs to do so.

To our mind, there are critical areas that require our particular and committed attention if we are to make human rights a reality for all. One is human rights education. We must continue to make this our priority, for only through an enlightened citizenry can human rights be defended and be made secure. Another is the enhanced partnership with civil society, particularly with non-governmental organizations. The value of their work in human rights cannot be overemphasized.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration comes at a critical juncture. Many parts of the world are in the throes of economic crises that have reversed the fortunes of many States and the successes attained in raising the standard of living of millions of people. Globalization stares human rights in the face. It may be time to view human rights not only in terms of individual rights but also from the perspectives of collective rights and human responsibilities.

Looking back over the 50 years that have elapsed since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, mankind has made substantial strides towards the development of a culture of human rights. As we look ahead to the next millennium, we must be unflagging in our efforts to make human rights a reality for every person, especially for those who have less in life. We must take up the challenge of making the Universal Declaration truly universal.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Georgia.

Mr. Chkheidze (Georgia): The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is one of the most crucial events to mark the history of mankind. Our special meeting today gives us one more opportunity to look back at our deeds, evaluate our achievements, and identify and tackle the root causes of our disappointments.

When we speak about the eradication of poverty, migration, environment, the problems of terrorism and so on, we must always take into account the pivotal element in all those challenges: the human factor and the respect of human rights.

The intensification of activities aimed at the protection of human rights and the strengthening of new and restored democracies, together with the positive achievements realized, have unveiled many a problem whose resolution will require a complex approach. Effective cooperation based on the agreements of the High Commissioner for Human Rights with Governments and with the non-governmental organizations of different countries should be further developed, as should be the human rights education system. Assistance to States aimed at creating and developing national structures must be more systematic and better planned.

As we have repeatedly pointed out, the problems of economic development and armed conflict are strongly correlated with human rights issues. Millions of people have lost their lives during bloody confrontations in different parts of the world, and the rights of a number of individuals are being trampled underfoot and overridden.

The plight of those who have become destitute and who suffer from poverty and economic privation is no less worrisome. Unfortunately, international efforts have not been persistent enough to overcome these factors or to allow us to speak about any considerable achievements in the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

It is regrettable that the effective mechanism for the protection of human rights remains the use of force. That is why it is necessary to work actively to elaborate this mechanism in order to decrease the side effects of its application.

The humanitarian situation of innocent people must be taken into account during the enforcement of sanctions, as well as during the enforcement of peace.

The creation of the International Criminal Court appears to be a landmark achievement that we can take pride in on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Everybody should know that crimes against humanity will no longer go unpunished and that the culture of impunity will cease to exist.

Georgia has a deep-rooted tradition of tolerance and humanity. The ups and downs of history and instigated conflicts have not been able to erase this tradition, and today we are building and developing our national institutions on the basis of this abiding character of the Georgian people. We have abolished capital punishment and introduced the position of public defender, and the respective commissions of the parliament have grown into a considerable force. In the governmental structures, human rights responsibilities are on the same level as matters of national security.

Despite serious hardships Georgia continues building its State. The number of refugees from the region occupied by the separatist regime exceeds 300,000. Considerable property has been destroyed. Georgia continues taking measures to build confidence between the parties by elaborating mutually profitable economic projects and pursuing a policy of reconciliation. The successful outcome of this policy, together with the will of the Georgian people and the activities of its Government, depends on the assistance of the international community.

In his letter to the world leaders, President Shevardnadze called upon the family of nations to spare no effort in finding ways to resolve the problems of refugees and displaced persons and in tackling the tasks of peace-building and economic recovery. In Georgia we have every prerequisite for attaining these objectives.

The Acting President: I now call on the representative of Mauritania.

Mr. Ould Deddach (Mauritania) (*interpretation from Arabic*): On this fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the conference that gave birth to it, let me say that this Declaration is one of the international community's great achievements. The right to development is a universal, inalienable right of human beings. The conference confirmed the indivisibility of human rights, and it recognized the unique cultural, religious and historic particularities of various States and nations. It also decided that human rights were going to be treated on the basis of impartiality, neutrality and cooperation in international relations.

After so many years, this celebration today provides a unique opportunity for the United Nations and its Members to increase efforts to promote awareness of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to enhance the commitments to its provisions, and to assess comprehensively the achievements reached in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the Vienna Declaration, and to see what remains to be done in this area and to provide for all possible efforts to implement those decisions.

The legislative framework protecting human rights in Mauritania is based on our constitution, which guarantees all citizens equal rights and responsibilities. The second paragraph stipulates:

> "The people are committed to these values and they are committed to the Islamic religion and they are committed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights."

They are also committed to the international conventions to which Mauritania is party.

The first article of our constitution states that the Republic "guarantees all citizens equality before the law, without any discriminations on the bases of race, origin, gender or social status".

In this framework, we have promulgated laws guided by the constitution and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — laws such as the general employment code and other laws governing parliamentary elections, as well as laws guaranteeing multiple political parties and freedom of the press. We have a human rights commission to promote these values, and it is entrusted with the task of promoting human rights and

implementing national strategies to combat poverty. Social expenditures in our country represent 37 per cent of our budget — that is, nearly double what was recommended by the Social Summit in this regard.

As part of this, we believe that the advancement of women and the fight against illiteracy are very important. We have a secretariat that was established precisely to promote the advancement of women and to combat illiteracy. They are having a direct impact on the family and the child and on our society in general.

My delegation pays tribute to the efforts by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. My Government is prepared to cooperate fully with that Committee as well as with all other human rights bodies. On this basis, my country presented its first report to the Committee last year in implementation of article 9, paragraph 1, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. We hope that this will be a first stage of a constructive dialogue enabling the Committee to acquire clarification regarding procedures of a legislative, administrative and judicial nature which Mauritania put into effect in the implementation of the provisions of the International Convention.

My country views favourably the holding in the year 2001 of an international conference on the combating of racism, and we invite the Commission on Human Rights to take the necessary steps so that this desired result can be achieved.

We are convinced that we must halt the various violations of human rights that have been witnessed in several regions of the world. At the same time we must prevent the recurrence of racial discrimination and ethnic cleansing, as well as attacks against creeds and religious beliefs. We call for the establishment of an atmosphere of peace, brotherhood, tolerance and of mutual respect in order to establish and promote human rights, which in turn will guarantee the success of collective efforts to establish human rights throughout the world.

The Acting President: At this juncture I would like to inform Members that we still have 58 speakers remaining on the list of speakers. In order to be able to hear all the speakers today — and, I hope, by the end of the afternoon meeting — I would like to appeal strongly to speakers, as the President already did yesterday, to respect the five-minute time limit for their statements. I thank you very much for your cooperation.

I now give the floor to the representative of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr. Calovski (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): Yesterday, the Republic of Macedonia, like other Member States of the United Nations, observed the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a common standard of achievement for the further promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The struggle of the Macedonian people for freedom, justice and peace, like that of other peoples, has had a bright and difficult moment in its long history. We have always believed that all human beings are born with equal and inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms, and that it is of crucial importance to promote the development of friendly relations among nations.

We are looking at the observance of the Universal Declaration as an essential part of the activities of the United Nations to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The United Nations efforts to prevent conflicts, to solve the ongoing ones, to strengthen international peace and security and to promote international cooperation in the political, economic and social fields will not have real meaning if they do not enable the enjoyment of all human rights, so clearly defined in the Declaration. It is important, therefore, to reaffirm that all human rights and fundamental freedoms are universal and indivisible, that they all are important, whether political, economic, social, civil or cultural.

We do not see the Universal Declaration as a final achievement or the last document on human rights. In real life, it will be important to reaffirm some of the rights espoused by the Declaration, and some should be further developed and adequately defined. Our actions should result in eliminating all forms of discrimination and should strengthen the dignity and worth of the human person. Our concern that human rights and fundamental freedoms are not fully respected everywhere — that they are violated — should strengthen our resolve to do much more in future.

Today, regretfully, all human persons do not enjoy the same standard of living. The gap is huge, and the efforts to narrow it must continue more resolutely. Human solidarity is an absolute necessity. The globalization of international life will not automatically close the gap between the rich and the poor and between the developed and developing countries. Our

Organization has the duty to influence future development so that growth could be bigger, democracy stronger, the rule of law a must, international cooperation less burdened with various barriers and conditions, and regional and global integration be enhanced.

In the present period of change, the United Nations should be the locomotive of that change. All human persons should feel themselves equal and worthy citizens of our common globe. All human rights and fundamental freedoms enumerated in the Universal Declaration should therefore be fully observed everywhere and by everybody.

Let me end by quoting a sentence from yesterday's address by the President of the Republic of Macedonia, Mr. Kiro Gligorov, at the Academy on the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Skopje, the capital of my country:

> "On the threshold of the twenty-first century, the whole of humanity is faced with an impressive task: to build a world of human rights, a world in which the death penalty will be a matter of the past, a world devoid of torture, where social, civil, political — all — human rights will be equal for all, regardless of the social, national and religious affiliation of people. We should all try to contribute to a world in which the respect of human rights will be deeply rooted in the culture of every society and in the minds of all people."

The Acting President: I give the floor now to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Jele (South Africa): Yesterday marked an important milestone in the annals of humankind. On that day 50 years ago, the United Nations General Assembly adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the Universal Declaration, this body reaffirmed in concise and simple language the faith of the peoples of the world in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person.

Until recently, that simple but eloquent phrase had a hollow ring to the vast majority of the people of South Africa. Ours was a political system which stood in stark contrast to the ideals enshrined in the Universal Declaration. Apartheid was a racially based political order which the international community declared a crime against humanity.

Thus, for us in South Africa the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has always been a beacon of hope. It is the one instrument that has carried the hopes and aspirations of our people.

The Declaration opened a new chapter in the field of human rights, particularly as it specifies the universal nature of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, that they are the inalienable rights of all human beings and the responsibility of Governments. Of utmost importance in this stipulation is the intrinsic value it attaches to the right to development, which, South Africa believes, underpins the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Though underdevelopment should not and must not be invoked to shield or justify human rights violations, experience has also shown that lack of development constitutes an obstacle to the full realization of all freedoms and human rights. There is a compelling need, therefore, to emphasize that the right to development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

South Africa views with deep concern current tendencies towards racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance in some parts of the world. In this context, it reiterates the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action on the need for Governments and other bodies not only to condemn such practices, but also to institutionalize measures and programmes against bigotry and new forms of racism. We therefore look forward to the convening and successful outcome of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance not later than the year 2001.

The establishment of national human rights institutions could play a pivotal role in the entrenchment of a culture of respect for human rights worldwide, thus making a major contribution towards the prevention of violations.

In the constitutional democracy that we have established in South Africa, human rights have taken pride of place. They have come to occupy centre stage in our daily lives and in the conduct of external relations with other States. Accordingly, our foreign policy is guided by human rights considerations indicating the kind of influence we wish to exert on the global arena. It is in this spirit that South Africa yesterday lodged with the

United Nations our National Action Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.

In lodging this National Action Plan, we have not only committed ourselves to the international community but also to the people of South Africa. Thus, in South Africa, the Plan was launched yesterday to coincide with country-wide celebrations relating to the fiftieth anniversary.

The approved National Action Plan constitutes an integrated and systematic national strategy of government aimed at the protection, improvement and advancement of human rights in my country. Through this measure and as an audit of the human rights situation, the Government seeks to identify areas in need of protection, improvement and advancement. The objective is also to identify and agree on areas of cooperation between government, the private sector, civil society and other role players in the promotion and protection of human rights.

On this auspicious occasion, I wish to announce that my country has also deposited with the United Nations its instruments of ratification relating to the two Covenants that form part of the International Bill of Rights, as well as the conventions dealing with racial discrimination and torture.

Let me state that we in South Africa are painfully aware that much needs to be done to make human rights a living reality for our people. This is a task that my Government takes seriously. Through the Action Plan and the international conventions to which we are party, we intend to strive towards that goal.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Israel.

Mr. Gold (Israel): Israel has strong ties to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that go beyond the values the Declaration enshrines. Both the State of Israel and the Declaration sprang forth in the wake of the same international outcry to restore rights that were violated as never before.

The rights recognized by the Declaration were not new to this century. Its authors, including Jewish scholars, drew on sources as ancient as the first chapter of the Bible, which proclaims that every person is moulded in the image of God. The Bible commands us to love and respect the stranger in our midst. As it is written: "Thou shalt neither harass a stranger nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt".

Yet in this century, these rights were trampled and tossed asunder with such horrific abandon that humanity as a whole was shaken to its foundations. The Nazi slaughter of six million Jews, with unparalleled brutality and humiliation — and the indifference of others — marked the gravest, most incomparable violation of human rights in human history. Out of the ashes, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights came to remind the world of the principles that should have been guiding rules of every society.

So, too, the right of the Jewish people to their homeland was not new to the twentieth century. It was recognized by the League of Nations as a historic, pre-existing right which had been denied the Jewish people for centuries past. But it was only the Holocaust that woke the world community to the urgent need to establish a Jewish State in Israel.

The historic link between Israel and the Universal Declaration is underscored by the fact that some of its central authors were Jewish Zionists, including the French Jewish leader René Cassin.

We can never truly compensate for the tragedy of the Second World War. The words of a thousand Universal Declarations could be read in less time than the names of just the children slaughtered by the Nazis. The entire population of Israel is still less than the number of those wiped out in the Holocaust.

But the founders of Israel insisted that their State symbolize a new hope, resurrecting the age-old values that seemed buried with the victims. Israel's Declaration of Independence proclaims that the Jewish State

> "will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex".

Among the first acts of the new State was to restore freedom of religion to the holy places of Israel, making them the freest and most accessible they had been in two millennia. This policy continued after 1967. Israel also put in place an active High Court. Even in dealing with territories Israel had come to administer after invading armies had used them for attacks, Israel's Supreme Court gave equal consideration to petitions brought by Arab residents of these areas. This was, in fact, the only

instance in history where an administered population was granted access to the highest civilian court of the administering Power.

We are most proud of that High Court's achievement in 1992, when it helped enact the Basic Laws that serve as Israel's de facto bill of rights, protecting the right to life, liberty and dignity; privacy and employment, among others. Let me add in this context that democracy, based on accountable government, is the best assurance for the protection of human rights.

This year, in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Israel has incorporated the Declaration into the curriculum of every high school civics class. Human rights, after all, are not just for speeches; they must filter down to the classroom, the textbook and the entire political culture of every United Nations Member State.

And yet, I am saddened to say that, despite these efforts, we are still forced to simultaneously deal with the constant threat of terrorism in our streets. In spite of the Oslo Accords signed five years ago, terrorism has since taken the lives of close to 300 Israelis. Liberty and basic human dignity are shattered when citizens cannot ride a bus, cross a street or sit at a café without the fear of a suicide bomb.

In this regard, let me add one note of caution. Terrorism depends on a vast infrastructure of support, often under the jurisdiction of sovereign States. Extolling human rights in this forum, on the one hand, and at the same time allowing one's territory to be a launching ground for terrorist operations is a mockery of the Declaration and an insult to the millions whose deaths inspired it.

We must, instead, stand firm in the face of these threats and allow our nations to live up to both the word and the spirit of this historic Declaration and to those of an even more ancient source. For it is written: "Justice, justice shalt thou pursue".

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): Today, together with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, more than 70 other human rights instruments are in existence. A consensus has emerged on the importance of the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all mankind. The adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action in 1993 is testimony to this. Gratified as we are by these positive developments, the debate on the human rights agenda will of necessity continue, as much still needs to be done. Hence, my delegation believes that our commemoration of this anniversary should be characterized by a sober and frank assessment of what has been achieved and what has not in the promotion and protection of human rights for the past half century.

Vast numbers of humanity in different parts of the world have not been able to enjoy the rights proclaimed in the Declaration. Hundreds of millions in the developing world are denied their right to development. This has become more evident and pronounced in the context of a rapidly globalized economy. The Asian financial crisis provides a clear illustration. Virtually overnight, the gains of decades of hard work and prudent management on the part of the Governments and peoples of the affected Asian countries were mercilessly swept away by the onslaught of the currency speculators and manipulators. Doubtless, the fund managers of Wall Street or the rating agencies had scant regard for respecting the rights of the poor labourers, farmers and petty traders in the countries concerned when making their decisions to suddenly pull out funds or to downgrade the ratings of certain economies.

Human rights abuses are still rampant and occur daily, particularly in areas of conflict situations. It is appalling and shameful that despite the universal adoption of the Declaration and other instruments, innocent civilians, particularly the most vulnerable ones, such as women and children, continue to be subjected to these violations. The international community must not only condemn those responsible for these grave human rights violations, but it must also see to it that they are punished. The appropriate mechanisms in place should be fully utilized to ensure the full protection and enjoyment of these rights.

It is most laudable that more and more people are involved in the universal effort to promote and protect human rights. However, it is important that those who are especially active and vigorous in these efforts should maintain a high degree of consistency, objectivity and credibility. Governments, leaders and others who wish to speak, much less pontificate, about human rights must be willing to look closely at their own situations first.

As we embark on the universal promotion of human rights, we will have to ask ourselves a number of pertinent questions: can we be truly objective? Should we be selective? Is it fair to apply double standards? Can we avoid being biased in our considerations? Are we absolutely clear about the situation or particular incident we wish to comment on? Do we fully understand the political, social and religious sensitivities involved and the implications of our actions? Should we not empathize rather than chastise when in certain situations the parties involved face fundamental political, social or economic constraints? When we talk of rights, should not there also be responsibilities and obligations? These are, not doubt, difficult, even disconcerting, questions. But they must be asked if we wish to maintain our credibility and moral authority as champions or spokesmen of human rights.

Malaysia reiterates its conviction that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. Human rights should not emphasize only civil and political rights. For Malaysia, as a developing country, economic, social and cultural rights, articulated through the larger framework of the right to development, are as important as civil and political rights. Widespread poverty and economic deprivation have compelled Governments of many developing countries to emphasize the economic transformation of their societies as the prerequisite for all other changes. Acknowledging the importance of economic, social and cultural rights does not necessarily relegate or ignore the importance of civil and political rights.

The Non-Aligned Movement, at its twelfth summit held in Durban, South Africa, last summer, underlined the need to review and assess the progress made in the field of human rights since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The summit also underlined the need to identify the obstacles and the ways through which they can be overcome, both by means of specific measures and by enhanced international cooperation, with a view to ensuring full enjoyment of all human rights, taking into account developments that have taken place during the last 50 years.

Malaysia strongly believes that the promotion and the protection of all human rights can be more effectively pursued through increased contact and dialogue and wider cooperation, rather than badgering and confrontation. Let us all do it together, as a truly cooperative and constructive endeavour, in the interest of all mankind, in the true spirit of the theme of this anniversary. In this the United Nations can play a pivotal role.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Namibia.

Mr. Andjaba (Namibia): Today we are gathered here to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Being on the threshold of a new millennium, it is therefore appropriate for us to reflect on and take stock of how far we have gone with our collective responsibility, as we the peoples should save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.

Fifty years later humanity is still yearning for a peaceful, just and prosperous world. New vision and foresight are thus called for. Bold and imaginative decisions are required.

The 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action states that "Human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of all human beings". Human rights are protected and secured by standards, laws and procedures. We are all custodians of those rights. The theme of this anniversary year perfectly captures the very essence of all human rights for all.

Since 1948 the United Nations has developed a very impressive range of international human rights instruments and mechanisms. Therefore, we have at our disposal a substantive body of international human rights law. In this connection, Namibia welcomes the establishment of the International Criminal Court. We have signed the Statute and are in the process of ratifying it. Now, more than ever before, we believe that the United Nations can live up to its lofty ideal of creating a peaceful, secure and just world for us and the generations to come. To this, Namibia pledges its full and total commitment.

The list of speakers is testimony of our collective belief and acceptance of the validity of the Universal Declaration. The Universal Declaration is truly universal. We believe that this document ranks as one of the greatest aspirational documents of our history. Today, we have so many more Governments than were present on 10 December 1948 and equally more voices from the wider civil society.

The Declaration proclaims in a non-hierarchical manner the rights belonging to all people, giving equal emphasis to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. It is the common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, and the rights and freedoms therein are to be enjoyed by all without distinction of any

kind such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, birth or other status.

The international community's success to date in implementing human rights standards cries out for new constructive approaches. We have not reached the occasion to celebrate. We still have widespread discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity and religious belief, and twice this century we have witnessed the abominable practice of genocide. Poverty is a violation of numerous basic rights. A very high proportion of the world is living in absolute poverty. The gap between the rich and the poor is growing, it does not seem to have an end in sight. Compounding the problem is the growing realization of the feminization of poverty. In many parts of the world there are gross violations of children's rights. Instead of being in classrooms, children are forced to be on the battlefield. Having said this, we must have the political will and commitment to reverse this process.

It is therefore vital to realize that the very essence of rights is their empowering capacity. This link should be at the core when promoting, protecting and implementing human rights.

For many years the people of Namibia were subjected to gross human rights violations, without any recourse. Therefore, following our independence, one of our main tasks was to put in place national institutions that would protect and promote human rights.

The Namibian Constitution — our supreme law, in which fundamental human rights and freedoms receive the highest possible authority — is the anchor of our values and beliefs. At independence, the Bill of Rights was used as a basis by the Namibian founding fathers and mothers of our Constitution. We looked to the Universal Declaration as the guiding document, which embodied the very norms and standards which the majority of Namibians for so long were viciously denied and fought a bitter struggle to attain.

Last year the Ministry of Justice and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights agreed on an extensive training and technical support programme, which already commenced earlier this year. The main purpose of such technical assistance, for which we are most grateful, is to strengthen the national capacity of our country towards better and more efficient human rights promotion and protection.

The liberation of the individual, the creation of equal opportunities for all, including job opportunities, and the right to a decent living standard are as important as the right to vote, freedom of speech and religion. Hence, the rights-based approach for us, in Namibia, is a concrete example of just how we as Governments, along with the United Nations system, can ensure that the beneficiaries of all human rights will be enabled to utilize these rights to their fullest.

Finally, allowing human rights to flourish is economically prudent and cost-effective, and it promotes peace and stability. Hopefully, the realization of the vision of the founding fathers of the Universal Declaration, 50 years ago, will become a daily reality for the next generation in the new millennium.

The Acting President: I now call on the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Al-Akwaa (Yemen) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Together with all humanity we are commemorating today the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption by the international community of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which represents the general framework for the subsequent international instruments whose contents now constitute what is known as international humanitarian law.

It gives me pleasure, in this respect, to confirm that the Republic of Yemen is a full party to most if not all of these international covenants and instruments. The spirit of these covenants and instruments is reflected in our constitution and in our national legislation and political approach. Among the principles called for by the Yemeni revolution is the establishment of social justice and economic prosperity and the liberation of the Yemeni people from fear, oppression, ignorance, poverty, disease and backwardness.

The Yemeni family recovered its unity when the country recovered its national unity on 22 May 1990. At that point we opted for democracy based on a multi-party system as a means of government, and for economic development based on the freedom of choice. This freedom of choice is an instrument for the full development of the individual and the society at all levels. As a result, there have been many cultural forums in our country, and the number of political parties has multiplied. It has become possible for all persons, female or male, as individuals or in groups, to exercise their rights and enjoy their full freedoms, particularly those

related to the freedom of opinion, belief and the expression of convictions by all peaceful means.

Human rights have become sacred, entrenched and inalienable and are not subject to abuse. We have become legally and morally duty-bound to defend and protect these rights and to encourage others to exercise them. However, it is important to note here that it is necessary to respect the substantive relation between a person's need for material development in all fields and his need for cultural, educational and political development, because each of these developments complements the other. We cannot build our societies or civilizations without individuals who are free from poverty, fear, humiliation, oppression, ignorance and backwardness.

It is useful to confirm here that the humanitarian assistance we are providing and the subjects we are tackling in this respect should be free from double standards and from selectivity in application. Otherwise, we will lose credibility and there will be a terrible contradiction between what we call for and what we do on the ground.

We cannot but express here our appreciation and gratitude for the work done by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as well as the other specialized agencies of the United Nations, along with non-governmental organizations and other humanitarian groups such as the International Committees of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent. We thank them all for their assistance and help, especially in the field of reinforcing human rights and protecting them against abuse and violations all over the world.

In conclusion, we call on the international community and the active civil establishments to redouble their efforts and coordinate their work in order to build a more human world, a world where the values of tolerance and love and peace will dominate and prevail.

The Acting President: I now call on the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Nejad Hosseinian (Iran): I am pleased to address the General Assembly on the occasion of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The adoption by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 of this important document, encompassing a wide range of rights, though certainly not all, was an historic turning point in the promotion of human rights. The influence of the Declaration has since been profound and extensive. Its ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and want and its emphasis on human dignity and value have for decades guided our collective endeavours for the protection and promotion of human rights. Most significantly, it has set the tone for further norm-setting and the development of human rights law.

Coming in the wake of the abhorrent ruthlessness and hideous atrocities committed on grand scale before and during the Second World War, the primary attention of the Declaration was given to civil and political rights. While the positive influence of these norms in promoting and solidifying the civil and political rights of individuals and ensuring their observance can hardly be denied, the elaboration of economic, social and cultural rights was neglected. It was only with the entry into force in 1976 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that those rights were addressed. Another important aspect — the question of cultural diversity — still had to wait.

It was not until the 1993 Vienna Conference that the international community was able to affirm the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelation of all human rights on the same footing and with the same emphasis. It was only there and then that the community of States Members of the United Nations reaffirmed the right to development as a universal and inalienable right and an integral part of fundamental human rights.

Moreover, in Vienna the importance of cultural diversity was also recognized — quite a welcome development and another step in the right direction. The fact of the matter is that global pluralism and cultural diversity on the one hand and the universality of human rights on the other are not contradictory; rather, they are mutually reinforcing. Furthermore, the ultimate objective of international human rights instruments is not to impose artificial uniformity on human beings, whose identities lie in their cultural, religious and historical backgrounds and values. Tolerance means respect for diversity, not its suppression in the name of universality.

To conclude, let me reiterate that, at the threshold of the new millennium and the new century, with all that it implies and entails, the Declaration does not need to be rewritten. Rather, every effort should be made to arrive at a more profound and comprehensive common understanding of its provisions. The recent initiative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human

Rights in seeking an Islamic commentary on the Universal Declaration is a positive and commendable step in the right direction. To face the formidable challenges ahead of us all, we need goodwill, open minds and hearts, flexibility, far-sightedness and, certainly, genuine dialogue among nations and civilizations.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Galuška (Czech Republic): As we meet here to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we look back and recapitulate not only the reasons for and circumstances of its birth but, primarily, the developments in the 50 years that followed. Sparked by the Declaration, endeavours to promote and develop human rights have generated the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, followed by a wide spectrum of human rights instruments adopted since the 1960s.

For the international community, the driving purpose has been to guarantee for each individual the basic aspects of his or her social existence. However, in the real world, the effectiveness of safeguards for noble values such as honour, dignity, personal liberty and equality is still open to question. Many of those internationally recognized and guaranteed instruments have been deplorably blunted by the reservations of States parties, intended to accommodate different national laws. In this context, the credit should go to the international community for seeking to realize human rights to the maximum extent and, above all, to human rights activists for their unfailing efforts to promote human rights in everyday life.

The Czech Government has recently appointed, as a part of its strategy for the more effective fulfilment of international commitments in the human rights area, a Government Representative for Human Rights. This institutional change will shortly be followed by new legislation designed to deepen and reinforce human rights protection and secure full compliance with international obligations.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration has been well publicized in the Czech Republic. To mark this event, the United Nations Information Centre and the publicly funded media and civic associations have initiated numerous exhibitions, symposiums, concerts and conferences.

Earlier this year, the Statute of the International Criminal Court was adopted in Rome, having jurisdiction over the most heinous international crimes in particular genocide and other crimes against humanity and war crimes. It is gratifying and, indeed, highly symbolic that the international community took this step of truly historic significance during the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration. Putting an end to the impunity of individuals responsible for the most egregious violations of human rights will certainly be instrumental in deterring the commission of such crimes in the future, thus contributing to upholding respect for human rights worldwide and to making the world a better, more just and safer place to live for generations to come.

The Czech Republic is at present completing, as a matter of priority, the respective domestic procedures with a view to becoming a signatory of the Rome Statute in the near future. We intend to continue to work hard towards achieving the establishment of an operational, effective and independent Court, at the domestic level by taking up the various actions required for ratification of the Statute, and through our active participation in the work of the Preparatory Commission.

In conclusion, let me express the hope that the efforts for the better implementation of indivisible, universal human rights will meet with the increasingly strong response of the global community.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Mra (Myanmar): Fifty years ago this day, the General Assembly, at its third session, meeting at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I am pleased to state that, by drawing lots, Myanmar was the first country to vote in favour of the Declaration at that session.

With that historic act of the General Assembly, we started the long and arduous process of safeguarding human dignity in earnest. The Declaration set a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations and became a moral force compelling the Member States to abide by the norms enshrined in it. Conscious of the horrible ways in which fundamental human rights and freedoms had been trampled and violated during the Second World War and resolved to put an end to the kind of atrocities that had outraged the conscience of humankind in that war, the far-sighted and visionary

framers of the Declaration set in it values and norms shared by all cultures and societies and valid for all time.

For the last 50 years, the Declaration has remained a basic source of inspiration for all national, regional and international efforts to promote and protect human rights and basic freedoms. Looking over the long journey we have made in those 50 years, we can detect that the universal and lasting principles of the Declaration have greatly influenced our thinking on matters concerning human rights. The International Covenants on Human Rights derived their strength from the Declaration. The language of the two Covenants reveals the common source of their inspiration. Similarly, the domestic legislation of many countries has been inspired by the Declaration.

Over the last five decades, the numerous declarations and resolutions of the United Nations and the regional conventions on human rights have drawn on the Declaration in spirit, as well as in language, in setting out various rights of the people. In the framework of the United Nations alone, a comprehensive body of human rights standards has been elaborated in more than 60 declarations, conventions and protocols concerning specific human rights issues. Furthermore, there are human rights instruments prepared outside the United Nations system, such as the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights, the 1969 American Convention on Human Rights, the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of 1981. Together, all these instruments further developed the fundamental principles enshrined in the Declaration. Similarly, in 1993, the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna, reiterated the lasting value of those principles.

As we draw closer to the end of the millennium, we are encouraged to observe that, guided by the spirit of the Declaration, the international community has made remarkable achievements in its endeavours for the promotion and protection of human rights.

As is clearly visible to all, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has successfully stood the test of time as a living document. As the years have passed, it has gained in status and the grand sweep of its noble spirit has widened. We believe that the bright light shed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in humankind's efforts for the promotion and protection of human rights will continue to illuminate our future path towards the common goal.

While a large number of countries have been successful in realizing, to a considerable extent, the ideals enshrined in the Declaration, others are still striving to translate the ideals into action compatible with their particular political, social and economic situations. To help such countries achieve the ideals we all aspire to, it is essential for the international community to treat human rights in a fair, understanding and constructive spirit. The fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the most opportune moment to renew our commitment to continue to strive constructively towards the "common standard of achievement" set by the Declaration.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Hungary.

Mr. Erdös (Hungary) *(interpretation from French)*: Hungary associates itself with the statement made earlier by the representative Austria on behalf of the European Union.

This debate in the General Assembly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has spectacularly highlighted the attachment of each and every member of the international community to the values enshrined in the Declaration.

And yet, examples of violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms are rife. Violations are committed on all continents. Most of the tensions, crises and conflicts that we witness are caused first and foremost by situations that have their source in serious violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and in overt or covert attempts to deprave democracy.

The necessary conclusion, despite the considerable progress achieved in this field and the expressions of belief in the dignity and freedom of the individual, is that there is still a great deal for all of us to do before rule of law and respect for human rights prevail on earth.

The World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993, reaffirmed the universal character of these rights and freedoms over and above particular national and regional characteristics and reconfirmed defence of human rights as a legitimate concern of the international community.

The spirit and the content of the Universal Declaration played a decisive part in the intellectual

preparation for the profound changes that took place in Central and Eastern Europe 10 years ago and contributed significantly to the crumbling of totalitarian systems and the flourishing of democratic transition. In this regard, a unique event of recent decades in Hungary was the setting to music of the Universal Declaration. This was done in the 1970s by a very popular group, and it was recorded and put on sale. This courageous deed met with resounding success and rightly so.

An important process that is now developing in Europe is the enlargement of the Euro-Atlantic structures. The requirement of full respect and protection for human rights in countries that wish to join is the result of the very essence and nature of the Euro-Atlantic institutions. The force of attraction of this integrative process has a notable positive effect on the functioning of democratic mechanisms in the countries that are knocking at the door of those institutions. Furthermore, we believe that the accession of those countries to the integrating structures cannot but give further impetus to the complete implementation of the provisions of the Universal Declaration.

Hungary will be in a position to contribute very specifically to the implementation of human rights in the world during its current chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe — the Council of Europe, an organization that has done much, even during the world's period of bipolarity, to implement human rights, including those of national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities. Suffice it to recall in this regard that today no one in Europe or elsewhere has any doubts about the fundamental importance of respect for minority rights in the preservation of peace and stability within our societies.

The objectives of the Hungarian chairmanship, include improving the effectiveness of the system of verification of obligations undertaken in the field of human rights — an objective whose importance clearly extends beyond the framework of the Council of Europe. During our presidency mandate, the Council of Europe plans to establish a European human rights court.

The principles that underpin the Universal Declaration have remained valid through decades of turbulence and will undoubtedly, at this age of globalization, remain a source of inspiration and guidance for the international community in its quest for justice and equal rights for all and in the activities that we hope will effectively defend those rights in their entirety.

The Acting President: I now call on the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Mr. Sergiwa (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) *(interpretation from Arabic):* Our commemoration today of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights demonstrates the international community's interest in promoting and respecting human rights.

The Declaration came into being after the peoples of the United Nations confirmed in the Charter their belief in the rights and dignity of man. Its articles deal with equality in rights and dignity among all the members of the human race. It urged them to treat each other in a spirit of amity and brotherhood.

The Declaration has become a solid foundation for the international community to conclude a series of important instruments, among them the two International Covenants on Human Rights that deal in detail with all human rights — economic, social, cultural, political and civil.

While we appreciate the efforts of the United Nations in reinforcing and promoting respect for human rights, and while we pay tribute to the results of the Vienna Conference on Human Rights, which confirmed the interrelated nature of human rights and fundamental freedoms and recognized the cultural, religious and historical particularities of States and peoples by establishing non-selective, neutral and objective guiding principles for dealing with issues of human rights, we cannot overlook the gross violations of human rights that are carried out in full view of the international community in many parts of the world, least of all those that take the form of genocide, the murder of innocent people and the displacement of women and children, such as those committed against the Palestinian people. That people continue to be the victim of the most horrendous practices of torture, detention and displacement. It is denied its right to self-determination and to establish an independent State of its own. Those violations have been all the worse because certain countries have politicized human rights issues and have engaged in selective policies to promote their own vested interests.

Thus, we have not yet achieved our common goal of protecting human rights by dealing with this humanitarian issue in an objective manner based first and foremost on effective cooperation founded on constructive dialogue and cooperation among States and on the elimination of

obstacles to the right to development. Our position is based on a belief that human rights does not mean only freedom from torture and persecution, freedom of thought and freedom to participate in governance. It also means freedom from hunger, poverty and disease, in a way that takes into account all the national, cultural and religious characteristics of every people so that the issue remains a purely humanitarian one.

My country has made continuous efforts in the field of strengthening and promoting human rights. These are reflected in the Declaration on the Establishment of the Authority of the People in the publication of the *Green Book*, in the primacy of the masses, in our accession to and respect for most international human rights instruments, and in the annual presentation of the Qadhafi Human Rights Award to all those who have done exceptional work to promote human rights and to advocate freedom anywhere in the world.

Despite all those efforts, we encounter many obstacles because of gross violations of the right of the Libyan people to development, to freedom of movement, to medical treatment and to practice their religion. These are a result of the air embargo, the coercive economic measures, the economic siege and the freezing of bank accounts. They result from unfair Security Council resolutions and from unilateral coercive measures.

On this great occasion, as we commemorate the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we hope that the United Nations will address the negative effects of the coercive sanctions imposed on the Libyan people, whose only sins are its refusal to capitulate to hegemony and its determination to live in freedom on its own soil.

We hope that on this occasion the international community will see fit to assess the progress achieved in the strengthening and promotion of human rights, and to identify obstacles to the genuine enjoyment of human rights by all peoples. We affirm our intention to redouble our efforts to observe the provisions of the Universal Declaration and of all other relevant human rights instruments.

The Acting President: I call next on the representative of the Republic of Moldova.

Mr. Botnaru (Moldova): The standards enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have stood the test of time and remain as valid today as they were a half-century ago. The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration will give new impetus to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the world. The Republic of Moldova highly appreciates the activities of United Nations human rights bodies and fully supports the efforts of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The promotion and protection of human rights is first and foremost a national responsibility. My Government attaches great importance to human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this respect, since our declaration of independence, all elections in my country, including the parliamentary elections held this year, which took place on a multi-party basis, have been free and fair. The new Constitution of the Republic of Moldova guarantees full human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, including national minorities.

The national parliament has adopted more than 20 laws dealing expressly with human rights. Respect for and protection of human rights in my country is also safeguarded by the Constitutional Court, which, by the principles of the separation of powers and of the responsibility of the State towards its citizens, has the final say on the Constitution. The Republic of Moldova has acceded to the main international legal instruments on human rights adopted within the framework of the United Nations and the Council of Europe, and is continuing this process.

Despite all the difficulties of transition and the negative effects of the international economic and financial crisis, my Government spares no effort in implementing human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the consolidation of human rights institutions. Unfortunately, the process of democratization in the Republic of Moldova is affected by the actions of the separatist regime in the eastern region, which violates the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the population. In spite of many appeals by international human rights organizations, the members of the Ilascu group, convicted and sent to prison illegally six years ago, have not yet been released. Nevertheless, my Government continues to undertake supplementary efforts to enable each citizen of the entire country to seize, defend, promote, understand and insist on his or her human rights.

Fifty years of history shows us that the process of the implementation of the principles of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights is still not an easy one. As we approach the new millennium, we have to recognize that violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms are still taking place in many parts of the world. No less important than the fundamental freedoms of thought, opinion, expression and belief are economic, social and cultural rights and the right to equal opportunity. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Mary Robinson, and many other people have said, economic and social rights must be treated with the same priority as civil and political rights. This is extremely relevant for countries with economies in transition.

The Republic of Moldova, as a newly independent State, was unable to participate in the process of drafting and adopting the Universal Declaration. We understand that our commitment to safeguard and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, first of all at home, and to help those who still do not have the opportunity to enjoy them will be our contribution towards this unique and noble goal.

Finally, I would like to reaffirm on the solemn occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the strong commitment of the Republic of Moldova to this cause and its determination to collaborate fully with all United Nations bodies in the implementation of respect for life, liberty, justice and equality in our still imperfect world.

The Acting President: I call next on the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): It is hard to be brief when talking about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for its role in the defense of the ideals it proclaimed in the modern world is too significant. It was the first international instrument in history to have universal significance in the field of human rights, emphasizing as it did the need to respect fully basic individual rights, democratic rights and freedoms for all, as well as listing such rights and freedoms. The adoption of the Declaration became the starting point for a series of international legal instruments that defined the obligations of participating States to ensure concrete rights and freedoms.

The belief in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and value of the individual, which survived in the trenches under the bombs and gunfire of the Second World War and behind the barbed wire of concentration camps, turned out to be stronger than dividing lines and ideological taboos. However, despite the fact that colonialism and bloc confrontation are things of the past, and while the frontiers of democracy have been expanded, one can hardly believe that the world is free when children are starving, refugee life is an ordeal, human lives and destinies are shattered in armed conflicts, and ignorance more than any form of censorship prevents people from knowing that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." *(Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 1)*

The theme of today's anniversary celebration, "All human rights for all", means that the Universal Declaration should not be read selectively or interpreted with bias. Similarly, it seems doubtful that democratic freedoms could be "encouraged" by indefinite economic sanctions and unilateral coercive measures. It is difficult to talk about universal justice when human dignity is determined by the ethnic origin of the person.

The Russian people have openly and fearlessly defended their right to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the preparation of which our country played an active role. We have set out on the road of building a democratic society in which human rights are one of the main priorities on the Government's agenda. Today's realities in Russia include democratic elections, political pluralism, freedom of expression, independent mass media and growth of the self-awareness of the civil society.

By order of the President of the Russian Federation, the year 1998 was declared the Year of Human Rights in Russia. Under the aegis of the Year, a number of important events took place in Russia — for example, the Federal Assembly ratified the basic conventions of the Council of Europe; the ombudsman for human rights was elected and the penitentiary system was transferred from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Ministry of Justice. Currently, the preparation of the presidential programme of action in the field of human rights is approaching its final stage.

The appeals of the United Nations General Assembly to increase awareness about the rights proclaimed in the Declaration and other international instruments in the field of human rights found support in Russia not only on the part of Government bodies, but also within a number of regional initiatives. These include in particular the international conference on human rights and ways of implementing them, which was

held last October in Saratov. The organization of such conferences in Russian regions allows for an opportunity to look at the human rights problem not only from the capital city, but also from those unbounded expanses that are Russia.

The Universal Declaration proclaimed that human rights should be protected by law. This principle lays the foundation for the activities of the Federal Assembly of Russia aimed at improving the national legislation on human rights and its adaptation to universal human rights standards. Inter-parliamentary cooperation makes an important contribution to this process. The one-hundredth Inter-Parliamentary Conference, held in Moscow in September this year was dedicated to the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration and appealed to national parliaments to strongly encourage and protect all human rights in the twenty-first century.

Despite current difficulties, Russia confirms its commitment to socially oriented market reforms, the principles of democracy and the protection of human rights and freedoms in order to achieve a genuine improvement in the quality of life for the Russian people. These are now the priority issues for the Russian Government.

Many solemn and nice words have been and will be said about the importance of the Universal Declaration. The main thing is that, having said those words, we should not forget that this instrument was adopted not for the celebration of anniversaries but for providing real protection to individuals in everyday life.

The Acting President: I invite the representative of Sri Lanka to make his statement.

Mr. De Saram (Sri Lanka): I am honoured to be able to speak in the General Assembly today on behalf of Sri Lanka.

The relationship between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations is close. The Charter of the United Nations, adopted in 1945, sought to make relations between States far better than they were. The Universal Declaration, adopted three years later, reminded the world that the individual, too, was worthy of attention in relations between States and worthy of care and dignity in national jurisdictions. The Universal Declaration set out what the world should regard as the substantive core of human rights. The United Nations took the message of the Declaration to all regions and all countries.

Concern for human rights is high on Sri Lanka's national and international agenda and will always continue to be so. Much has been done in Sri Lanka to promote awareness of and to ensure protection for human rights, and much more will certainly continue to be done. National and community leaders in towns and villages now teach that the rights of the individual begin at home — in the family unit and in the immediate environment around one — and that in respecting the rights of those close to one there will be movement towards the observance and the protection of the human rights of all.

At the international level, Sri Lanka's participation is substantial in human rights treaties and in the implementation of the obligations under those treaties. A party to the two International Covenants, Sri Lanka is among the parties to the first Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its particularly demanding provisions.

We really do believe that our record is a heartening one whose central theme is that of uniting all the people of Sri Lanka in the democratic processes of the country.

Sri Lanka wholeheartedly supports the central role of the United Nations in the field of human rights. We are concerned, however, that amidst the poverty around us, the United Nations is slow in according the imprimatur of human rights to such collective rights as the right to development. We are concerned as well that the violation of human rights by entities other than governmental entities do not always receive the condemnation they deserve from those in positions of international influence and authority in the field of human rights.

We recognize, of course, that in relations between States the world is in continuous evolution and that there will also be a continuous evolution in the position of the individual in society. We know that in the continuity of evolution there will be exceptional years of great advances. There will also be depressing years of great regressions when the scale of violations of human rights, as in recent years, reaches the magnitude of crimes against humanity and gives rise to global yearnings for international criminal tribunals.

If the record of the last 50 years is not entirely encouraging, let us hope that the next 50 years will be more humane. Let us build on the unquestionable contemporary premise that many of the most effective

endeavours that could be made towards universal observance of human rights lie well within the national jurisdictions of States and touch some of the most important aspects of life within national societies. Considered in this perspective, it seems possible that we may eventually conclude that there may be limitations to the effectiveness of international treaties and their legal obligations and that it is now time to return to the language of the initial proclamatory paragraph of the Universal Declaration, to the enunciation of standards of achievement, to the language of exhortation, to the language of religious leaders, to discourse and to dialogue.

The Acting President: I invite the representative of the Solomon Islands to make his statement.

Mr. Horoi (Solomon Islands): From the perspective of 50 years of United Nations history, the General Assembly's adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights may appear to be something of a miracle. Proposals to include a bill of rights in the draft Charter of the United Nations were offered at the San Francisco Conference but were deferred until the Organization came into being. The Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly created the Declaration in less than three years of work, an extraordinary achievement. As several delegations said during the final hours of debate in the General Assembly, however, the Declaration was but a compromise, the best that could be obtained at the time. It was a splendid compromise, and Solomon Islands joins the international community in this fiftieth anniversary commemoration and pledges its never-ending commitment to the letter and spirit of the Declaration.

Our celebration here must be a sober one, for as we speak, hundreds of millions of people are being denied their fundamental rights. Poverty, which deprives over a billion people of many of those rights, remains a monumental challenge. For those who lack sufficient food, decent housing, safe water and sanitation, and access to education, it is a continuing struggle to maintain human dignity. Nor is there human dignity for those who are discriminated against because of their race, religion, ethnic origin or gender. The complex economic, political and social factors that generate poverty and permit it to continue must be effectively addressed.

Children and adults caught in situations of armed conflict suffer violations of their basic rights and freedoms, while those who commit the offenses escape accountability. Solomon Islands views the International Criminal Court as a significant step towards bringing to justice those who perpetrate these acts against humanity. I had the honour of signing the Statute on behalf of my Government earlier this week, and the process of ratification by Solomon Islands will soon be under way.

The state of a country's economic development and progress will affect the degree to which the fundamental rights of the people are met. Least developed countries such as Solomon Islands struggle with the provision of a number of these rights. International cooperation to assist these countries to realize their right to development is essential and must be a significant component of the global human rights programme. Moreover, technical assistance to help us fulfil the reporting requirements of human rights conventions is needed.

The protection and fostering of human rights begins at home. My country's national Constitution embraces the people's basic rights, and my Government, like its predecessors, continues working to realize them. The geographical, linguistic and cultural diversity of Solomon Islands poses unique challenges to this effort. A country of over 900 islands and more than 80 indigenous languages and dialects is challenging indeed. Solomon Islands society is based on the extended family, whose collective rights have long been recognized. The rights of the individual traditionally have been protected in the context of the extended family. We are largely a village society where the people live in a subsistence economy in which the extended family provides the individual with basic necessities. Understandably, a high value is placed on the protection of the family's collective rights.

In a land tenure system where the clan as a whole is custodian, an analysis of the rights of the individual is complex. Here the issues are not only basic rights but the extent to which the individual can enjoy those rights in using the land and benefiting from its resources. Internal and external changes are making this a critical challenge to our society. The relationships between the individual, the family and the environment, in fact, bring profound issues to the implementation of human rights in the Solomon Islands.

We cannot afford to use culture or family as excuses for inaction in the field of human rights. Instead, we should employ these concepts as the threshold for questioning and formulating strategies to ensure that individuals and groups in our societies are accorded all of their human rights. Mutual understanding of and respect for the cultural diversities of our societies will strengthen

the national and international human rights systems. A holistic approach to human rights is essential for the people of Solomon Islands.

In societies like that of Solomon Islands, the interaction between the rights and obligations of the individual and the extended family must be recognized and monitored with sensitivity. The social changes taking place require it.

Efforts to achieve the universality of human rights begin in our communities. These initiatives should take into account the unique situation of our people and our society. Solomon Islands is committed to this necessary and noble endeavour.

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Al-Dosari (Bahrain) (*interpretation from Arabic*): At a time when my country must congratulate the international community on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Bahrain cannot but pay tribute to the important role played by our Organization in the dissemination of these values and principles throughout the United Nations system — the General Assembly and its Committees, the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies, in particular the Commission on Human Rights, and other relevant mechanisms, most particularly the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In view of the fact that the Islamic religion bases itself on the principle of equality and interdependence among all human beings, whatever their race, and the principle of tolerance as a foundation for human relations, Bahrain is convinced that the Declaration is one of the basic pillars of international law by which we should be guided in our promotion of human rights.

Thus Bahrain's commitment to the Declaration is rooted in our deepest conviction as to the values and principles promoted by the tolerant Islamic sharia, which is reflected in this Declaration. Bahrain is convinced that the necessary efforts to implement the principles of the Declaration must be accompanied by a guarantee of all humanitarian principles, such as the fundamental right to a life in conditions of dignity and particularly security and stability within society in the areas of employment, housing, health care and education.

My country has come a long way as regards sustainable development and the creation of a society that is developing from an economic, social and cultural perspective. This is clear from the reports — particularly the *Human Development Report* — published annually by the United Nations Development Programme. Bahrain has for the third consecutive year been listed as an advanced country as regards human development.

Bahrain's commitment to the spirit that animates the Universal Declaration has enabled it to concentrate its efforts on guaranteeing freedom and dignity for all of our citizens, in line with their cultural and social status and on the basis of equality, without imposing any ideas or ideals, political or otherwise, that would be dissonant with the environment of the Bahraini citizen. Inspired by the tolerant Islamic sharia in this respect, my country would like to stress the importance of respect for religious and cultural preferences and the social customs and mores of States and societies.

We are convinced that the States Members of the United Nations should work together to bring about a greater degree of understanding and to reduce the differences of opinion as regards human concepts that exist in different societies. On 4 November 1998, we adopted resolution 53/22, entitled "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations", which we think is an important step towards the promotion of dialogue in this field.

My country is convinced that cooperation among States can be based only on dialogue and coexistence among different cultures in order to enable the different perspectives to converge in a practical manner, building trust and confidence among States and establishing peace and stability. My country is entirely prepared to contribute to bringing about such cooperation in order to better implement the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on this, its fiftieth anniversary.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Cameroon.

Mr. Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon) (*interpretation from French*): After the plea for human dignity given here on 30 September 1998 by Mr. Augustin Kontchou Kouomegni, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Cameroon is eager to intervene once again in this debate in order to show its gratitude, renew its commitment and express its confidence.

First of all, Cameroon would like to express its gratitude to those who, because they were bruised in body and spirit by barbarous attacks on human beings and their dignity, crafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This hymn to hope remains one of the highest and most accomplished expressions of human conscience in the twentieth century. In it the peoples of Cameroon have found inspiration, courage, strength and determination in their struggle for liberty, dignity and full participation in the life of international society.

Tribute must be paid to the United Nations, which since it was established has made the promotion and protection of human rights a main concern. Thanks to the Organization and under its auspices, various international covenants and other conventions have been adopted in order to increase the force of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to expand its scope.

Remarkable progress has been achieved, and we have every reason to be proud of this. We must all note, however, that millions of human beings are still ravaged by hunger and malnutrition, that our century continues to witness serious violations of fundamental human rights and that disturbing trends are emerging. Thus, there are those who would like to promote and defend a single right or a single category of rights. Also, human rights are used more and more often for blackmail and to apply all kinds of pressure. Nonetheless, since we have subscribed to the Declaration, we all know that human rights are universal, interdependent and indissociable. There is a gap between the agreed letter of the texts and the spirit that today is still far from being respected in real life.

The fiftieth anniversary should awake in us a collective will and determination to build a better future. Today we must plant the seeds of more humane and neighbourly tomorrows. In this spirit, Cameroon would like to renew *hic et nunc* its fidelity to human rights and its commitment to promoting them.

Evidence of this fidelity is the inauguration yesterday in Yaoundé of a square and a bluestone stela dedicated to human rights. This monument lies at the foot of the avenue named after Jean-Paul II, the indefatigable defender of human rights. What a coincidence — a unified symbol, a unified message.

Additional evidence of this fidelity is Cameroon's signing of the Statute of the International Criminal Court on the very day it was adopted in Rome. From this commitment came the policy devised and, since 1982, implemented systematically and with determination by Mr. E.M. Paul Biya, President of the Republic, designed to inculcate the rule of law and democracy in public life, so that Cameroon will forever be a law-abiding State and an enlightened defender of individual human dignity.

If this is truly to come to pass, the participation of every citizen is essential. Thus we have particularly stressed the diffusion and popularization of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights among all social strata, and especially among the youth — the Cameroon of the future. The goal is to establish in hearts and minds, on the one hand, the democratic culture without which there is no democracy, and on the other hand, that tolerance — that acceptance of the other and of diversity and of differences — the very basis for human rights and the *sine qua non* for their respect.

Let us not forget; intolerance, negation of the other and the refusal to accept diversity and differences are the source of the atrocities that humanity has experienced and which, unfortunately, it continues to experience.

Cameroon would like to express its confidence that the United Nations, its Member States and civil society can make the third millennium the millennium for the realization of human rights, and thus the millennium of human dignity. We can do this. We must do it by fighting on two fronts: to establish throughout the world democratic regimes and the rule of law which are guarantors of respect for human rights, and also to eradicate poverty, which today most undermines human dignity. This requires an acute sense of partnership, solidarity and self-sacrifice. This is how we will be able to build during the coming century and the next millennium a civilization worthy of human beings.

Thereby we will have paved the way for a new springtime for the human spirit and given full meaning to the expression, "We, the peoples of the United Nations" — an expression that speaks eloquently of mutual trust, security and solidarity.

The Acting President: I call now on the representative of Armenia.

Ms. Aghadjanian (Armenia): For the international community this is the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the adoption of which undoubtedly constitutes one of the major events in human history. The fact that at this moment the attention of the global community is focused on this

debate is clear evidence that, more than in any previous time in the history of mankind, the global community today concentrates on the issue of the promotion and protection of human rights.

We realize that all human rights and fundamental freedoms are of a universal nature and are a birthright of all human beings. Moreover — stressing that democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing — Armenia especially welcomes the increasing attention that is being paid to economic, social and cultural rights, alongside the civil and political ones.

One of the main challenges for the protection and promotion of human rights remains their implementation at the national level. Addressing this issue in individual countries in a balanced and cooperative way has proved to be a constructive method for the implementation of human rights on the international level.

The President took the Chair.

With this in mind, ever since independence, Armenia has been making a consistent effort to bring its national legislation into compliance with international norms and standards, particularly in the field of human rights. Since the collapse of the Soviet regime Armenia has taken the path of democracy, and it decisively strives to create a democratic society. In the first years after independence, Armenia has acceded to all six core human rights treaties and has done this without reservation.

The Human Rights Year coincided with a new stage of democratic development in Armenia. In March, the President of Armenia established a presidential commission on human rights, which, in fact, is a transitional institution for the period preceding the completion of the legal framework necessary to set up the institution of ombudsman.

The Universal Declaration created a solid foundation for further action and initiatives by the United Nations and other interested international bodies, as well as by the States and national organizations concerned. Since 1948, the United Nations system has made substantial progress in promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms worldwide. However, much remains to be done, and this anniversary has become an appropriate occasion to reaffirm the principles adopted 50 years ago and to define new ways and means for their implementation, especially taking into account the new structure of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the High Commissioner's new mandate and role.

When we speak of human rights, we speak of tolerance, understanding, compassion for the human condition, and we speak of the rule of law and good governance, a requirement which applies to all nations and Governments.

I would like to conclude by recalling once more that the United Nations is the United Nations of "We, the people", not "We, the Governments", and therefore it is called upon to protect the rights of individuals and individuals themselves. Armenia strongly believes that human rights can and will become the common language of mankind and that the commitment to human rights will bind people together and guide the peoples and Governments in their relationship in the new millennium.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Latvia.

Mr. Priedkalns (Latvia): First of all, I should like to extend my sincere congratulations to the winners of the Human Rights Prizes. These awards honour the courage, commitment and dedication of a very large number of persons and organizations who have worked for the advancement and enrichment of the dignity of humankind.

In this statement, Latvia has aligned itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union by our Austrian colleague.

Human Rights Day this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Men and women around the world have found inspiration in the principles embodied in the document. They have found an enduring relevance of those principles to the realization in their lives of justice, freedom and spiritual wealth. They have found a genuine universality in that the principles cherish the rights of all people and that they are embedded in the spirit of each member of the human family.

The Declaration is one of the most significant documents of the twentieth century. It is based on a fundamental premise that human rights do not belong to any one civilization, nation or system of thought, but that they are truly universal, indivisible and interdependent. The implementation of the principles of the Declaration is an essential prerequisite for the realization of political

and economic rights, for the attainment of the stability of democratic institutions and for a fair distribution of the wealth of humankind.

The Universal Declaration serves as the foundation of an international system for the effective protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Fifty years ago the Declaration established a set of principles which have inspired the authors of international instruments on human rights. Numerous institutions for the defence of human rights have come into existence as a result of these documents, including in my country, Latvia.

At the time of the adoption of the Declaration, Latvia was under foreign occupation. The occupying Power violated human rights on a massive scale but, paradoxically, at the same time participated in the adoption of the Declaration. Only three and a half months after the adoption, the occupying Power carried out mass deportation of Latvian people to hard labour camps where many of them died.

Some decades later, the United Nations institutions for the protection of human rights became known in Latvia. Expression of opposition to the occupying Power more and more frequently relied upon United Nations human rights documents. Since the restoration of independence, Latvia has committed itself to the protection and promotion of human rights for all people of Latvia and for their social integration.

Today, Latvia supports the incorporation of human rights objectives into all aspects of United Nations work. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is the primary mechanism for that purpose. Promotion and support of national human rights institutions must remain a part of the human rights programmes of that Office. As a newly elected member of the Commission on Human Rights, Latvia believes that universal respect for human rights should continue to be a priority objective of the United Nations system, also requiring an increased allocation of resources.

Human rights are linked to human responsibilities. In this light, Latvia believes that the establishment of the International Criminal Court is a major accomplishment and welcomes the support expressed for the Court by a growing number of States. This summer, Latvia's Foreign Minister, Valdis Birkavs, as Vice-President of the Conference, stated that Latvia, as a State which has itself suffered from unlawful regimes in the past, is morally and juridically obliged to strive that the United Nations further develop the means at its disposal to ward off aggressors and dissuade potential perpetrators of crimes against humanity.

On this significant anniversary, let all peoples of the world renew their resolve to work together, striving for a secure, just and peaceful world, a world where the inherent dignity of the human person is recognized, where peace is linked with justice and privilege with responsibility, a world with equal opportunity for civil and political rights, for social and economic development and for cultural diversity enjoyed by all.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Samoa.

Ms. Solofa (Samoa): For the first time in history, by the Charter of this Organization, the peoples of the United Nations reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small. Reaffirmation in 1945 was an important and momentous acknowledgement of the inherent rights and natural condition of the human person, of the rights which had always been. The public elaboration of the content of the Charter regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the other international human rights instruments stands today among the truly great achievements of this Organization.

The impact of the Universal Declaration has been influential and cosmic. It has spawned treaties and inspired national constitutional provisions, among them the constitution of my own country. While at the time of its adoption in 1948 it was a Declaration without force of law, it has since had a powerful influence on the development of contemporary international law. Fifty years on, there is wide acknowledgement that the Universal Declaration has generated binding norms, their universality undeniable.

As we gather at this fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we contrast the world of 1998 with that of 1948 when, at the time of adoption, the General Assembly consisted of 58 Member States — not the broadly representative United Nations General Assembly of today. Yet, with the global order now so fundamentally different, the Universal Declaration of today stands no longer as a document of doubt or opposition, but as a tested and validly reliable reflection of the evolving global consensus on the norms

of decent human conduct by which the international community can judge the behaviour of States, and by which States themselves desire to be judged.

It is right that we pay tribute to the many important achievements of the past 50 years. International awareness of human rights has never been as great as it is today. The worldwide engagement of non-governmental organizations and grass-roots organizations has given a special measure of strength and depth of commitment.

At the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993, the universality and indivisibility of human rights were proclaimed anew and reaffirmed yet again. That too, especially with the moving, often eloquent participation of ordinary citizens and civil society, was a remarkable occasion. But it was as critical then as it is today to make a choice, for it was no longer sufficient to accept the mere expression of the goodwill of States to fulfil human rights demands. Concrete steps for implementation, a solemn obligation of all States, were the order of the day, and the failure to take them was a legitimate concern of the whole international community.

Human rights and freedoms are the essential ingredients of democracy. The core principle that sustains them — justice — can best flourish under democracy. My Government believes deeply, at least for our own country, that human rights and freedoms are best nurtured in the context of our culture and traditions.

Our celebration of this day carries the recognition that human rights lie at the heart of all that the United Nations aspires to achieve in peace and development. It is fitting that we salute all who have fallen and all who continue to carry the banner in the cause of human rights. May I say in this connection that my Government supports fully the work of the High Commissioner and, in particular, her call for a rights-based approach to development, as well as for empowering people to demand justice as a right.

But all is not well. We know from the recent report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that systematic and massive violations of human rights continue to dominate the international agenda. Poverty worldwide is persistent and disturbing; the calculated slaughter and ethnic cleansing of peoples and cultures are at their most offensive. That they take place is an indictment of us all, a critical test of the sincerity of words and the determination of actions which this Organization and its entire membership must take.

An earlier generation proclaimed the Universal Declaration, giving light and inspiration. As we move on, as we must, towards a finer vision of humanity, we realize that at issue is what human beings need and what they treasure most: fundamental justice. That, as we have been reminded, is irreducible.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Haiti.

Mr. Lelong (Haiti) (*interpretation from French*): In submitting to the General Assembly at its third session the draft universal declaration of human rights, the representative of Haiti, Senator Emile St.-Lôt, in his capacity as Rapporteur of the Third Committee, recalled how, some eight years earlier, we had had to defend our ancient civilization and resist unbridled barbarism behind a rampart of energy, will and heart. It was, he added, the sanest and most noble of crusades, that of men of all races, all colours, all languages and all religions in defence of their freedom and the rights inherent in their dignity as individuals.

The Commission on Human Rights, established by a decision of the Economic and Social Council and the Third Committee, drafted a document in the framework of the two contradictory concepts of the age, seeking to harmonize the ineluctable needs for human freedom with the imperatives of justice and social solidarity. This Declaration, whose fiftieth anniversary we are commemorating today, represented the greatest joint effort ever undertaken by humanity to lay down new foundations of law and morality based on liberty, equality and fraternity.

For those who, like us Haitians, are offshoots of the African tree transplanted in America, this commemoration recalls to memory and consciousness the bitter experience of the great violation of human rights perpetrated in Africa and America for more than two centuries, the afflictions of which continue to this day. The Haitian revolution, having been the first to proclaim the abolition of slavery in 1794 and to universalize the democratic principles of 1789, which until then had been beyond the reach of blacks, was testimony to the exceptional precocity of the vision of Toussaint Louverture and a distant precursor of the Declaration.

Without attempting to summarize the road travelled since 1948, we must recognize with satisfaction that minds the world over are today steeped in awareness of human rights; that the dissemination and acceptance of

those rights are growing day by day; that the constituency of totalitarianism is gradually shrinking; that justice is growing stronger, particularly with the progressive development of international tribunals whose impartiality must be able to withstand every test; and that the protection of women and children, minorities and diminished majorities is the object of a collective commitment.

We also wish solemnly to recall on this occasion the fundamental importance of the right to development, without which traditional rights lose their meaning and effectiveness. Nonetheless, we must also clearly mark the road to follow in defence of human rights, which is a collective duty, monopolized by no one, non-politicized and strictly impartial.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has not turned our universe into paradise. Despite the progress achieved, the increasing tragedies and the escalation of massive and systematic violations are brutal reminders of the ease and frequency with which the noble ideal of defending human rights can be compromised.

These disappointing outbursts of savage reality must not crush us. In our opinion, that is the deeper meaning of this commemoration: to reaffirm and strengthen our commitment to making real what is still today a mere promise to the humble and wounded of the world.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*interpretation from Arabic*): On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to be the common ideal for which all peoples and nations should strive. This commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration enables States to report progress made in the implementation of this Declaration, against the background of the struggle against naziism and fascism. The Universal Declaration has become the cornerstone in the efforts to guarantee human rights.

The State of Qatar attaches major importance to the question of human rights. In a statement he made on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, His Highness Sheikh Abdulla bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior of Qatar, announced that the State of Qatar has continued to develop its legislation in defence of democratic public freedoms. He stated, *inter alia*, that the State of Qatar confirms its appreciation of the efforts undertaken by the United Nations system and agencies in this regard and affirms its own commitment to ensuring rights and duties, laying the foundation for justice, supporting democracy and providing a decent standard of living for citizens and resident expatriates alike through its continued efforts to develop its legislation and laws and to modernize the procedure in force.

Moreover, in conformity with the State's approach of emphasizing its unswerving commitment to human rights on all international, regional and local occasions, and in line with its eagerness to embrace anything that might enhance that approach, it stresses its profound interest in all the resolutions of the United Nations and international organizations relevant to human rights and that it upholds effectively and responsibly the spirit and provisions of that historic Declaration and other human rights instruments adopted since 1948.

His Highness the Prime Minister also stressed that the State of Qatar supports all resolutions aimed at providing more human, social, legal and economic rights. His Highness also stressed Qatar's humanitarian and social role in international problems, crises and catastrophes that take place in various parts of the world, in fulfilment of its international obligations and in conformity with the principles of our great Islamic religion and our moral values and in the service of the aims of relevant international organizations.

As a concrete expression of the determination of my Government to follow the democratic approach, instructions were issued to hold the first elections for the Central Municipal Council in Qatar on 8 March 1999, and citizens eligible to vote were asked to exercise their right. Moreover, the Emir's decision last November establishing a commission to draw up a permanent constitution for the country, which provides for the election of a legislature through direct balloting and represents the belief of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the beloved Emir of the country, in the importance of democracy as a basis for governing and of popular participation in decision-making and in the formulation and sound implementation of State policy.

We should not deny the atrocities and the suspicions of the past. We should seek to prevent the continued violation of basic human rights in the new millennium. We remain convinced that unless progress is made in the realm of economic, social and cultural rights, the world will continue to witness international conflicts leading to migration, displacement and the violation of human

rights. On this occasion we must recall the tragedy of the Palestinian people, whose land has been occupied and whose rights have been violated. We call upon the international community to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and to establish their independent State on their national soil.

This fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights should prompt further restructuring of United Nations human rights activities and support for the staff of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights by ensuring it sufficient financial resources. In this regard, we would like to commend the actions recently taken by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, and we reaffirm our support for her efforts in this regard.

We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General, who has done his utmost in the service of the international community during this critical phase in the existence of the Organization. I would also like to thank him for attending this commemoration.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Honduras.

Mr. Gutiérrez Navas (Honduras) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I am deeply honoured to address this lofty forum of the international community and to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your eminent guidance of the activities of this session.

We are commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an international document that expresses the links between individuals and society and upholds the need for an international social order in which the individual's rights and freedoms can and must be fully realized.

Since its adoption on 10 December 1948, we have been struggling to bring about effective and efficient international protection for human rights. Efforts at the regional level in this regard have produced the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man and the Inter-American Charter of Social Guarantees, which has a major moral dimension of State commitment. Such efforts have also produced, at the formal legal level, the American Convention on Human Rights of 22 November 1969, which provides guarantees through its international organs, such as the International Law Commission and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the jurisdiction of which my country has accepted unreservedly.

On 24 September 1998, and from this very rostrum, the President of my country, Mr. Carlos Roberto Flores, spoke of Honduras's historical struggle to have a democratic system of Government take root in our soil, to take its place within the international community as a State ruled by law and, in its independent existence as a Republic, to ensure respect for essential human rights and the enjoyment of public freedoms by all our inhabitants. However, many of these efforts were frustrated in some regrettable stages of our past, a past intimately shared with the other States of the Central American region. Fortunately, in recent decades Honduras has maintained and strengthened its democracy and its domestic institutions, despite the upheavals and the deplorable circumstances that prevailed in the Central American region as an involuntary theatre of the cold war, imposed on us from outside, and the attendant, unwelcome armed conflicts.

Because of its geographical situation and by virtue of a strong tradition deeply rooted in the soul of our people, Honduras has for many years been a place of asylum for those who have had to seek abroad the security that at some point they could not find in their countries.

In the last decade, Honduras had to host more than 300,000 refugees. It suffered the grave consequences of instability, insecurity and violence in the region, as a result of which thousands of Honduran citizens emigrated to other countries, particularly to the United States, where, unfortunately, our countrymen have not been treated fairly in that they have not been offered the same opportunities and immigration considerations enjoyed by other Central Americans.

In addition, not long ago, as reported by the international media, all of Honduras was battered by the devastating effects of hurricane Mitch, which destroyed more than 60 per cent of our economic structure, leaving a million people homeless and hungry and depriving more than 6,000 citizens of the dearest human right: the right to life. This is the worst tragedy suffered by my nation in its entire history.

This is an opportune occasion to refer to the purposes and principles of the United Nations, as expressed in the Charter, especially the purpose of achieving "international co-operation in solving

international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion". I would also like to quote from the sixteenth preambular paragraph of the Declaration on the Right to Development, adopted by the General Assembly in the annex to resolution 41/128 of 4 December 1986:

> "the right to development is an inalienable human right and ... equality of opportunity for development is a prerogative both of nations and of individuals who make up nations".

My country is proud to be an original founding Member of the United Nations, to have incorporated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in our domestic laws and to respect its international commitments in favour of human solidarity, respect for the self-determination of peoples, non-intervention, the strengthening of peace and universal democracy.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Bulgaria.

Mr. Sotirov (Bulgaria): Bulgaria has aligned itself with the joint statement made by the Austrian representative on behalf of the European Union.

The tenth of December is a day of celebration, full of events of commemoration and observance here at United Nations Headquarters, as well as around the globe. All of us in the General Assembly Hall heard yesterday one of the greatest voices ever in human history, which is a vivid example of the human race's creativity and uniqueness. And there is no doubt that one of the milestones in the preservation and promotion of this uniqueness and the dignity of the human being is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Today we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of a United Nations Declaration that made history. As rightly pointed out by the President of the General Assembly at its third session, back in 1948,

> "It is the first occasion on which the organized community of nations has made a declaration on human rights and fundamental freedoms ... and millions of people, men, women and children all over the world ... will turn for help, guidance and inspiration to this document." (*A/PV.183, p. 166*)

Today we pay tribute to those who, on 10 December 1948, at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, prompted by the tragedies and horrors endured during the Second World War, adopted a document that fosters respect for fundamental rights and freedoms and recognizes the importance of the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights. The rights to life, food, shelter, access to medical care and freedom from torture or arbitrary imprisonment are found there, along with the rights to education, freedom of religious belief, information, expression, association and peaceful assembly, and the right to take part in the cultural life of the community.

The Declaration which contains this broad range of rights became a source of inspiration and the foundation for impressive standard-setting activities within the United Nations. More than 60 United Nations human rights instruments and a large number of regional treaties were inspired by the Declaration. Its principles have been enshrined in and continue to inspire the national legislation and constitutions of many States. References to the Declaration have been made in the charters and resolutions of international organizations, as well as in treaties and resolutions adopted by the United Nations system.

Human Rights Day 1998 is a day on which all of us who enjoy human rights should try to imagine life without them — and how hard we would fight to retain them. It is a day for those who are still denied their human rights to dream again of asserting them, and to know that their dream is our dream — the dream of human rights for all. It is a day for us to recall not only the rights attained over 50 years, but also the rights denied; to pursue the achievement of justice by all and for all; to defend against the abuse of human rights with greater vigilance than ever; and to pursue the violators of human rights with greater persistence than ever.

On this day of celebration, when we recall what has been accomplished, we cannot turn a blind eye to the other side of the coin: there is still a considerable gap between aspirations and achievements, between standards and implementation. We still live in a world where millions are uprooted from their homes and untold numbers arrested arbitrarily or imprisoned without trial. Sadly, it remains a world where torture is practised, where more than a billion people are living in poverty, where children are still exploited, the elderly neglected and women denied their fundamental equal rights. We are still witness to violence and rape, ethnic tensions,

discrimination and inequality of economic opportunity, as well as the legacies of abusive regimes. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, put it recently, "the currency of these violations is a sobering reminder that we have no basis for self-satisfaction or complacency."

That is why it is especially rewarding and symbolic for all of us here at the United Nations that two days ago, just in time for the great occasion, the General Assembly unanimously adopted the Declaration on human rights defenders.

Today, human rights are present in almost every sphere of the work of the United Nations, from peacekeeping, children's rights and health to the rights of women and indigenous peoples. Bulgaria is actively involved in international cooperation in the human rights field. In the last few years, my country has made considerable steps in making its democratic institutions more effective on the basis of the rule of law. Bulgaria has accepted the highest universal and regional standards and incorporated in its national law the international human rights instruments to which it is a party. The Constitution of 1991 and the following intensive legislation have created a sound basis for democratic rule and for the strengthening of the civil society.

Furthermore, it is now my distinct privilege and honour to announce from this high rostrum that on 10 December, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration, the Bulgarian Parliament adopted an act abolishing the death sentence. The few articles in the penal code that used to provide for capital punishment were replaced by provisions for a maximum sentence of life imprisonment without parole.

In conclusion, I would like to recall an eloquent phrase from the address by Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the University of Tehran, which marked, exactly one year ago, on 10 December 1997, the beginning of the fiftieth anniversary year:

> "Human rights are the expression of those traditions of tolerance in all religions and cultures that are the basis of peace and progress ... Human rights ... are foreign to no culture and native to all nations ... Tolerance and mercy have always and in all cultures been ideals of Government rule and human behaviour. Today, we call these values human rights." (*SG/SM/6419*)

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): Indonesia is most pleased to join the international community in commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is indeed encouraging that as we prepare to meet the challenges of the venty-first century, we do so on the solid foundation of such instruments of great foresight and idealism.

In the five decades since its adoption, the Declaration has remained the centrepiece of United Nations human rights activities, providing overall guidance for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is the basis for a now vastly enhanced international human rights programme, which has undergone substantial elaboration, not only in the codification of rights and freedoms but also in the development of human rights standards.

I believe it is important to recall on this occasion that much of the strength and relevance of the Declaration derive from the fact that it was carefully crafted through a process of international cooperation in which various points of view and the aspirations of all peoples were heard. Fortunately, the progressive measures and cooperation sought by the Declaration have gained prominence and strength in recent years. Selectivity in human rights should remain a practice of the past and be soundly rejected as we enter a new age.

It is fitting that we celebrate this anniversary during a year in which the United Nations also reviews the follow-up to the World Conference on Human Rights. For it was at that landmark Conference that the international community reaffirmed its commitment to the purposes and principles of the Declaration, emphasizing its role as the source of inspiration and the basis for United Nations advances in standard-setting. And whereas the Declaration reflects the importance of the health and well-being of the human person and the family, the World Conference stipulated that widespread and extreme poverty inhibits the full and effective enjoyment of human rights. Certainly, we must gain wider respect for the dignity of the human being by lifting mankind out of the poverty in which so many languish. We must provide the means for adequate food, education, health, nutrition and housing that continue to be denied to over a billion people. To that end,

advancing the right to development is crucial to the further progress and improvement of the human condition.

For its part, Indonesia has worked vigorously over the past half century to achieve the goals enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for even before its adoption in 1948 the essence of its principles was embodied in our national Constitution. A central aspect of our effort has been the alleviation of poverty and the enhancement of the socio-economic environment. Concurrently, in following up and implementing the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, Indonesia has made great strides in many other areas of the human rights spectrum. This year, we have taken significant measures through the adoption of the Indonesian National Plan of Action on Human Rights 1998-2003, which indicates that at least eight international instruments will be considered for ratification over the next five years. Under that plan, Indonesia will enter the next millennium within a culture of human rights.

As we approach the closure of the fifty-third regular session of the General Assembly and celebrate this half century anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, let us resolve to set political differences aside and work together, as envisaged in the Declaration, in a spirit of cooperation and, through the application of progressive measures, promote and protect universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. There is no better way that we, the inheritors of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, can manifest the commitment to human rights which has so often been voiced in this forum, and thereby pass a legacy of genuine accomplishment to succeeding generations.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Fiji.

Mr. Rabuka (Fiji): My delegation is most privileged to participate in this auspicious commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today, 50 years after the international crusade for human rights was launched, such rights have become entrenched in all aspects of national, regional and international institutions.

As a result of the crusade for international rights, in most countries of the world the suppression of people, dictatorships, autocracy and repressive public administrations have given way to democratic principles, norms and practices. It would be true to say that where the voices of the people were once stifled, they are now speaking out. More and more, the constitutions of nations contain bill-of-rights provisions which set out and guarantee the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual.

Without a doubt, the international community has achieved a great deal in the area of human rights, but as we look at hot spots around the world, the conclusion is obvious that total victory over the abuse and breach of human rights has not been won. As we treasure and pursue the precious gift of human rights, the international community should and must take appropriate and prompt action to address violations of human rights, especially where such violations lead to catastrophic consequences such as genocide and ethnic cleansing.

But while we take steps to buttress respect for and observance of human rights, we must ensure that human rights are not used as a tactic by the more powerful to intervene in the internal affairs of the small, less powerful countries, on the basis of the narrow national interests or considerations of the former.

My delegation also submits that human rights are not totally circumscribed by legal and political rights. My delegation is of the view that economic and social rights must be part and parcel of human rights. Such economic and social rights should and must include the right to life, and life embraces such rights as the right to work, the right to adequate health services and medicinal supplies, the right to adequate housing and the right to the best possible education.

The materialization of these rights will require the full cooperation and collaboration of the international community, especially the developed, industrialized countries, international organizations and international financial institutions in facilitating and promoting the development of developing countries in order that the rights of all peoples in all countries can embrace the rights to employment, adequate health, housing and education and so forth. The right to development should take into account, *inter alia*, social and cultural factors in each country, the level of economic and social development and all other relevant factors. My delegation submits that the realization of the right to development will provide a critical test of the political commitments of Member States in enabling human rights to be enjoyed by people all over the world.

My delegation hopes that the fine and noble sentiments expressed yesterday and today by many delegations will find expression in the annual meetings of

the General Assembly, especially in the Main Committees, in particular the Second and Third Committees, and believes that they should permeate the policies of the World Trade Organization and the Bretton Woods institutions.

Let us all together pledge to observe and promote human rights in all their aspects, particularly the right to life and the right to development, as we strive to ensure international peace and security the world over.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mr. Mwakawago (United Republic of Tanzania): The United Republic of Tanzania welcomes the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as both a momentous and reflective occasion.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights continues to stand out as one of the major political statements designed to give effect to the ideals and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. While the framers of the Declaration may never have imagined that it would be able to guarantee human rights to all of the world's citizens, it has proved to be a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations. It was in the context of these ideals that the constituent parts of the United Republic of Tanzania, the former Tanganyika and Zanzibar, struggled, fought and obtained their independence. Indeed, it is in the pursuit of these ideals that the wars of liberation in southern Africa and elsewhere found justification and international support.

While the successes we can catalogue are both impressive and gratifying, serious shortcomings in the practical implementation of international human rights standards continue to exist. Self-determination and independence did not necessarily result in full respect for the dignity of the citizenry as human beings and as individuals. It is in this regard that we continue to pay homage to the memories of those who lost their lives in the genocides in Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and elsewhere. Those atrocities continue to be a grim reminder of the reality that we cannot afford to let down our guard.

As we commemorate this anniversary, it is indeed important that we recommit ourselves to the real meaning of the rights package. Freedom of speech, protection against torture and other civil and political rights are an important component of the package. We have no doubt that this is the truth; but it is not the whole truth. The Universal Declaration established that human rights include the right to social security, the right to a reasonable living standard, the right to food, the right to education, the right to housing, the right to health and the right to work, among others. In other words, it established the right to development. This is the fullness and the essence of human rights.

This fullness, both in our conceptualization and approach to human rights, is important. It is important because it makes social justice a matter of right. Those who belittle or dismiss this concept have, in our opinion, never contended with the extent to which such denial undermines the strengthening of the international human rights regime, which derives its legitimacy and moral authority from the support that all of us must extend.

Perhaps one of the regrettable developments in our efforts to translate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into binding legal instruments was the division of the rights it enunciated into two separate conventions: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. That it was not possible to keep them as a package perpetuated the perception that the rights were different in nature: that civil and political rights were primary, while economic and social rights were secondary.

We have never seen it that way, nor are we making that contention. We have seen these rights not as competitive, but mutually supportive. As a result, our Governments now recognize that economic growth and eradication of poverty are indeed encouraged by free discussion and the rule of law. We are also keenly aware that it is far easier to promote civil and political rights in an environment of positive economic development where economic and social rights are protected. We see this approach as constituting the consensus adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights as spelt out in the Vienna Declaration.

The United Republic of Tanzania sees universal human rights as being rooted in many cultures. We therefore believe that we can learn from different cultures in a pluralistic perspective.

In conclusion, what we have achieved as an international community is a milestone. However, we

have a long way to go. The challenges before us remain daunting if our people are to realize the full promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary, it is only fitting that we rededicate out commitment to the Declaration and, indeed, to the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I now give the floor to the representative of Liberia.

Mrs. Gbenyon-Diggs (Liberia): On this auspicious occasion commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it gives me great pleasure to pay tribute to those illustrious visionaries who conceived the idea of universal respect and protection for the inalienable rights of all people, regardless of sex, colour, creed or religion. I feel particularly proud of the role of women in promoting and protecting human rights, from Eleanor Roosevelt to Mary Robinson, champions of increased awareness of human rights issues.

As a result of its moral imperative and the legal and political importance it has attained, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has increasingly become a truly universal document. Indeed, it is a beacon of hope in mankind's struggle for liberty, justice, freedom and human dignity. Liberia, a country born out of a yearning for freedom and independence, knows the virtues of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We are proud not only to be one of the original signatories of the United Nations Charter, but also to have been in the vanguard of championing the cause of freedom, self-determination and justice for all.

Mr. Semakula Kiwanuka (Uganda), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The world's greatest achievements are notably recognized on 10 December, when the Nobel Prizes are presented for outstanding accomplishments in world peace, literature and science. It is therefore fitting that in Oslo, Nobel laureates David Trimble and John Hume are being honoured for their contributions to peace-building in Ireland.

There have been enormous gains in transforming the rights of people globally since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 50 years ago. However, much remains to be done in States where practical actions are in conflict with the provisions of the Declaration.

In one country after another, the fundamental rights of individuals are being violated in various forms. As the promotion and protection of human rights are central to the wholesome development of the human person, Member States of the United Nations have to adopt practical actions and policies to prevent abuses against their peoples.

We wish to pay deserving tribute to the leadership of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which persevered, against all odds, to create the enabling environment that led to the end of the Liberian civil war and the restoration of constitutional democratic rule in which the people of Liberia are assured the enjoyment of their basic human rights. Significantly, ECOWAS bears the distinction of being the first regional organization to collaborate with the United Nations in achieving the peaceful settlement of a conflict.

We are pleased to report that since the end of the civil war in Liberia and the ushering into power of a democratically elected Government, the question of human rights has gained primacy. We have no illusions that democracy inherently protects human rights as embodied in the Universal Declaration. Our relatively nascent human rights agenda has made several advances.

In endeavouring to reaffirm Liberia's commitment to human rights, the Government this year constituted, by an act of legislature, an independent Human Rights Commission headed by a former member of the Supreme Court of Liberia. The Commission has the mandate to investigate, document and expose any human rights abuses against persons or groups of persons in order to ensure redress under the rule of law. The Government has also sought, and is receiving, assistance with training in the rule of law, good governance and police sensitivity to human rights concerns.

There is a proliferation of non-governmental human rights bodies in the country which are helping to influence Liberia's policy agenda. The Government welcomes this collaboration and encourages genuine dialogue in this respect. Liberia also has an energetic civil society which has been influential in pressing for greater accountability and transparency in the execution of public policies.

To demonstrate the great importance of the anniversary, the Government of Liberia held a week-long programme — National Human Rights Week — involving a series of activities which commenced on 4 December

and ended on 10 December, with a symposium centred around the theme "All Human Rights for All", in close collaboration with civil society, national and international non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies.

Liberia is a party to most human rights instruments. The core treaties that it has not yet ratified or acceded to are now before the Liberian national legislature for action.

As we observe the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we wish to reaffirm our commitment to improving the lot of humankind by taking the appropriate actions that will guarantee respect for the rights, dignity and value of others. It is only through positive actions that the generations after us will be assured a peaceful world.

The Acting President: I now call on the representative of Lesotho.

Mr. Mangoaela (Lesotho): Yesterday was a milestone in human history, representing as it does the celebration, which we continue today, of an event whose meaning for us all is often underrated. To be sure, we all proclaim faith in the magnificence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but if we were to scratch below the surface of those proclamations we might find different understandings of the true essence of the Declaration. The challenge facing humankind in the future, therefore, is to steadfastly work towards a convergence of understandings of the meaning of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the treaties that have emerged from it. We must recognize that human rights exist in truth in their implementation and not in pious declarations. For human rights to be effective, commitment to their observance must be universal. To achieve such a result is the daunting task before us for the next 50 years and beyond. We cannot fully enjoy a human right if not all people understand it the same way and if, consequently, there are varying degrees of commitment to it.

Fifty years ago, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, for many countries under colonialism in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean the prospect of the exercise of the right to self-determination seemed so distant. India, the most populous colony, had just gained independence from Britain, while by a perverse coincidence 1948 also marked the birth of apartheid, unarguably the most inhuman system based on theories of racial superiority since the demise of nazism. In those dark days the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a beacon of hope that inspired the resolve of colonial peoples of Africa to battle until self-determination was assured and victory against apartheid achieved. In that battle they were gratified by an outpouring of support from democratic peoples everywhere and by support through the United Nations. It is therefore no accident that today the Governments of Africa are strenuously seeking to consolidate democracy and a culture of the observance of human rights, since it would be ironic if the victims of such egregious human rights violations were themselves guilty of similar conduct.

In Lesotho, for instance, after 23 years of arbitrary rule we are slowly and painfully learning to adjust to the vicissitudes of an imperfect but tried and tested electoral system. The violent reaction of some of our compatriots to the skewed results that are often associated with such a system has left wounds that can only heal when all people of good will determine to resolve differences through dialogue rather than violence. It is heartening to note that, despite the lawlessness that prevailed in the country for weeks, the perpetrators of these acts are being tried in the courts of law and not, as in the past, extrajudicially. The prevailing tolerance has engendered the beginnings of mutual trust, even if this is still fragile, and all political parties have returned to negotiations mediated by our neighbours. The collective will to defend democracy and safeguard human rights and fundamental freedoms in our region is unwavering.

Even as we celebrate the progress that has been made in the promotion of human rights worldwide, we cannot fail to observe that the road ahead is still very long, steep and slippery. In many countries, including my own, respect for and protection of human rights is a very recent experience which is still fraught with the danger of reversal. But progress there has been. Since 1948 a number of binding commitments have been entered into to strengthen a wide variety of human rights and fundamental freedoms: torture has been outlawed; the acceptance of the right to life is gaining ground; women's right to equality has been reaffirmed time and again even as efforts were made to dilute it by references to equity rather than equality; and most important, the right to development has been recognized.

Lesotho is a party to five of the six major human rights instruments, namely the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination

against Women. The Government is in the process of ratifying the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. It is also carefully reviewing Lesotho's reservation to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Despite limited resources, it is also revising its strategies for meeting its reporting obligations under the treaties to which it is a party.

Lesotho shares the view that violations of human rights and international humanitarian law are reprehensible. In Rome earlier this year, the international community took a historic step in the name of human rights and the rule of law when it adopted the Statute of the International Criminal Court. Lesotho's active participation in the Rome Conference was guided by our aspiration to bring an end to the global culture of impunity by advancing the cause of international justice. The Court is our proud bequest to future generations, and we pledge our commitment to ensure that the Court is up and running before the end of the century. It is against this backdrop that Lesotho signed the Statute two weeks ago and expects to ratify it soon.

The year 1998 marks not only the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but also the five-year review of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. The World Conference on Human Rights recognized the linkages among democracy, peace and development. It also reaffirmed that the right to development was a universal and inalienable right and an integral part of fundamental human rights.

As a least developed country, Lesotho attaches the greatest importance to the right to development. We are dismayed, however, that there are still some points of difference between us and some other Member States on the meaning of this right, and we would like to work assiduously towards resolving those differences. Furthermore, we are of the view that official corruption represents one of the most insidious abridgements of the right to development inasmuch as those who benefit from it deny the rest of the populace the resources necessary for their development. A thorough analysis of the right to development is needed before it can be properly understood.

Finally, we also realize the interdependence and mutually reinforcing nature of democracy, development and respect for human rights. We firmly believe that, as stated in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, lack of development should not be invoked to justify the abridgement of internationally recognized human rights.

The Acting President: I call next on the representative of Niger.

Mr. Diatta (Niger) (*interpretation from French*): At the outset, I wish to say that my delegation fully associates itself with the statement made yesterday by the representative of Burkina Faso on behalf of the countries members of the Organization of African Unity.

The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights unquestionably provides a good opportunity for the General Assembly to assess the international community's implementation of that unprecedented Declaration, and to remove remaining obstacles to the creation of a world culture of human rights. In that connection, we cannot fail to agree that the patient and determined work of the United Nations over half a century to give effect to this moral commitment by the international community has made it possible to make considerable progress in promoting and safeguarding human rights. The promulgation of numerous international legal human rights instruments; notable action taken against racism, racial discrimination, religious intolerance and torture; and support for democratization: these are some of the noteworthy elements of that work.

My delegation takes the excellent opportunity provided by this solemn commemoration to reaffirm the complete faith of the people of Niger in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose essential provisions have, moreover, been integrated into the Constitution that now governs our society.

My delegation wishes also to reaffirm my Government's firm commitment to respect and ensure respect for the rights and freedoms that our Constitution guarantees to every citizen. Indeed, as His Excellency Mr. Ibrahim Mainassara Baré, President of the Republic of Niger, said when he addressed the General Assembly on 23 September, respect for these rights and freedoms "is a precondition for the progress of human society" (*A/53/PV.12, p. 9*).

The grave violations of human rights that continue to be perpetrated in our world — which are due primarily to the absence of the rule of law, bloody conflicts and confrontations and persistent situations of widespread poverty — have also led my delegation to agree that

much yet remains to be done in order to build a world where the dignity and value of the individual human being are respected by all. The genocide and war crimes recently committed in the Balkan region and in the Great Lakes region clearly confirm this harsh reality.

It is therefore up to the international community to remain mobilized to ensure respect for political, economic, social, civil and cultural rights everywhere, including the right to development, as set out by Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments. Moreover, given the resurgence of genocide and other crimes against humanity, we must also establish appropriate jurisdictions in order better to punish the perpetrators of those crimes.

In this regard, my delegation welcomes the establishment of the International Tribunals dealing with genocide and war crimes committed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, as well as the recent establishment of the International Criminal Court, whose Statute the Niger has already signed. We therefore keenly hope that the establishment of such international mechanisms will contribute to preventing once and for all the perpetration of all acts that are abhorrent to the human conscience.

My delegation remains convinced that through further vigorous initiatives we will be able to pass on to future generations a world of peace, liberty and justice stamped with the triumph of human rights.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Dominican Republic.

Ms. Aguiar (Dominican Republic) (*interpretation from Spanish*): With my first words I wish to express the admiration and respect with which my country, the Dominican Republic, associates itself with the observance of this important commemoration.

It was at our ancient university, the oldest in the New World, where the first humanists in the Americas were trained, beginning with the first Rector of the University of Caracas, established in 1725, and the first Rector of the University of Havana, founded in 1728, and going as far back as the founders of the spiritual conquest of the Americas — the sons of Bishop Ramírez de Fuenleal and Alejandro Geraldini, who set up the first American college to promote the humanistic tradition. We in the Dominican Republic can also be proud that our country served as one of the early settings for the very idea of the United Nations, as it was in Old Santo Domingo that the transcendent dilemma of the freedom of the human being was first discussed — a major triumph and political fact of singular significance of the first 20 centuries of the Christian era. The protagonist of that feat was a humble monk and the author of *The Advent Sermon*, Fray Antón de Montesino, a herald of the doctrine that was to serve as a basis for the right of every man — including the aboriginal American, who at the time was still at the margins of civilization — to enjoy the prerogatives that from that time forward were considered to be superior to any reason of State. With these historic contributions and with our participation from the early days of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Dominican Republic has always defended the important principles universally enshrined as inherent rights of humanity.

In the context of an innovative policy in this field, our participation in the 1948 session was marked by the efforts of Ambassador Minerva Benardino, who recently passed away, for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to recognize explicitly the equality of men and women under the law.

We can state with satisfaction on this occasion that the subject of protecting human rights is becoming increasingly relevant on the global agenda. We see that a growing number of countries are ready to harmonize their domestic systems with international standards, which in practice implies the building of a common edifice of shared values with regard to human dignity.

The Dominican Republic has kept all its appointments with history to bring about progress in the field of human rights — at San Francisco in 1945, at Paris in 1948 and at Rome in 1998, where we left a symbol of our attachment to the principles of justice, freedom and liberty in a historic preamble. However, as many of the previous speakers have reaffirmed, human rights are a living, dynamic and evolving issue. We believe in the principles reaffirmed at the Vienna World Conference that human rights are indivisible and interdependent. We believe that the right to development represents the fusion of all the human rights applicable to individuals and peoples and grounded in the testament of those Dominican friars of the sixteenth century, who, on the island of Hispaniola, called on the representatives of the established order to turn their eyes to the general human condition of the oppressed American native as proof of the need to respect human life and treat human beings with dignity.

Today, as yesterday, the Dominican Republic expresses its hope that this legacy will never be betrayed.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Guatemala could not fail to attend this commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights because first, respect for human rights is a matter of universal concern and it is therefore imperative for every country to strive to ensure their observance. Secondly, respect for human rights is one of the cornerstones of our own recent efforts to establish a democratic society and to consolidate peace in Guatemala. A long road has been travelled towards the fulfilment of the ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights since the United Nations Commission on Human Rights began, in 1979, to examine the situation of human rights in Guatemala, concluding its consideration of the subject in April of this year. Thirdly, human rights is a matter that links Guatemala intimately to the United Nations. The conclusion in 1994 of the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights in Guatemala between the Government and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca not only reaffirmed the country's attachment to the principles and norms designed to ensure and protect the full observance of human rights, it also established a verification mechanism under the United Nations itself.

In addition to recognizing its intrinsic worth, if we are to fully appreciate the Declaration whose fiftieth anniversary we are celebrating, we should recall that the Declaration constitutes the first enunciation at the global level of the basic principles of human rights. Furthermore, the Declaration is the foundation of the wide-ranging and ever-more effective system of human rights declarations and treaties that have been adopted at both the global and regional levels. Those texts have not only created a large body of rules, but have also established a multitude of jurisdictional and monitoring organs. Furthermore, I do not believe that the operational activities undertaken by the United Nations to promote respect for human rights would be what they are today if this impressive system stemming from the Declaration had not come into being.

I should like to revert to a topic I touched on earlier: the verification of human rights in Guatemala. Following the first and successful instance of its use in the sister Republic of El Salvador, that modality has been, and continues to be, applied for the same purpose. It involves a United Nations mission charged with verifying, *in situ* and with the consent of the Government subject to verification, compliance with an agreement on human rights. In the cases of both El Salvador and Guatemala, the agreement is part of a series of commitments — also subject to verification — that have been entered into in order to put an end to a conflict. This unprecedented and original method of safeguarding peace has been invaluable to our countries.

For all these reasons, it is with the greatest enthusiasm and solemnity that we associate ourselves with the commemoration of the Declaration's fiftieth anniversary. It is our fervent hope that by the dawn of the next millennium, impunity, violence and the absence of the rule of law will have become things of the past.

(spoke in English)

I should like to use my last 30 seconds to suggest that it would be very nice if the Secretariat could prepare, as an additional homage to the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration, a document containing all 126 five-minute statements made during this meeting.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.